

Student Life Center Proposed

November 22, 2011

By Travis Highfield

Development is currently underway to implement a new student life center on Augusta State University's Wrightsboro Road campus.

Consultants from Brailsford & Dunlavey, a program management firm based out of Washington, D.C., visited Augusta State on Aug. 30 and 31 to meet with school officials and student focus groups to discuss what features should be included in the new building.

Augusta State currently has only one dedicated student center, the Jaguar Student Activities Center located on the Walton Way campus attached to the Reese Library.

"Think of it as a JSAC West," said Jeff Foley, assistant vice president for campus development.

Foley, who was instrumental in helping to shape the events for the two-day period, said the visit went just as planned.

"By setting up meetings with the leadership on campus as well as hosting student focus groups, the consultants left knowing what concerns we have here," he said. "It really helped this company know what gaps we have now and what steps we want to make in the future."

Joe Winters, an assistant project manager at Brailsford & Dunlavey's Charlotte firm, said they left with a better understanding of Augusta State's goal in providing such facilities.

"What we took away is there is a clear mission to provide an experience on campus that is first class," he said. "President Bloodworth and the rest of the faculty and students made it obvious to us what are the highest priorities. It is clear that the administration is lined up with the publicized mission."

During the two-day visit, the consultants met with faculty and staff to discuss the current state of Augusta State student facilities as well as listen to suggestions to better understand what they think should be prioritized. Student focus groups were divided between current freshman, upperclassmen and graduate students.

"(Augusta State) is a very vibrant campus with a lot of different concerns," Winters said. "You get a broad range of participation on a campus like this compared to other campuses. With President Bloodworth involved as much as he has been, it is just uncommon."

Winters said Augusta State's status as a commuter school creates challenges when it comes to properly implementing a new student center.

"ASU is unique from that perspective," he said. "We have to think of how we can reflect and apply the desires of the student body as a whole."

In addition to their visit to the campus, the company proctored an online survey which was taken by faculty, staff and students. The survey, which ran from Sept. 16 to Sept. 25, offered more than \$1,000 in incentives along with a brand new iPad for responding.

"The survey is exactly what the consultant needs to produce a quality assessment of the university," Foley said. "We didn't have to extend it because everyone responded in a timely fashion."

Winters said 24 percent of students responded compared to 18 percent of the faculty and staff.

"While the numbers seem low, the participation here was strong," Winters said.

The questions that appeared in the survey were taken directly from the input the Brailsford & Dunlavey representatives received while on their visit. The results have been received but details will not be made immediately available.

"It will be a couple of weeks for (Brailsford and Dunlavey) to digest, correlate and prioritize what they received," Foley said.

Despite the wait, Foley said he expects the results will give everyone involved a better understanding of what is to be expected on west campus.

“We will have a better idea of what it is that students want to see in the new student center,” he said. “We can then compare those results to the concerns of the leadership on campus to see how the two will fit together. This gives us a way to recognize priorities so (the university) can coordinate and consolidate so that everybody is on the same page.”

A final presentation is expected to be put together by November. From there, revisions and a final report can be issued by the end of the November. Augusta State can then seek an architect to discuss design.

“Whatever it is, it is going to be cool,” Foley said. “It will be game-changer for incoming students.”